

JOHN MARION POSEY

by Ralph Lea & Janice Roth

The story of John Posey, early resident of the Lodi area, continues in this edition.

It was 1876, the centennial of our great country, John was a teenager and Lodi was seven years old. John recalled his first encounter with the telephone. "I was in the Louie Hansel Grocery Store in Stockton...I heard the bell and no one answered...it rang again a while later and a clerk answered the phone." That was when he learned about the different rings and the party line. A few years later John was among the first on a party line in this area. The phone was hooked up by the Lilly Brothers of Lodi and connected to the barbwire used for fencing, thereby serving a dual purpose.

John recalled that there were no screens on the doors or windows. Flies and mosquitoes were so bad that fires were often built to smoke them out. The cows were milked in the open corral. Barns were expensive and were scarce in the early days. In winter the corral was shoe deep in mud and at times it was boot deep.

John recalls another story of his youth. "I was quite sensitive of my surroundings. I loved the farm and



Mr. & Mrs. John M. Posey; wedding picture 1891.

willingly accepted the responsibility of my daily chores. The old folks (Mr. & Mrs. Dunbar) permitted me to stay home from school to my liking...I fell behind in my studies. I did not complain so long as I was permitted to go hunting and fishing. I was small for my age, my health was only fair and I suffered from severe cold's due to exposure during the winter months. I walked four miles per day to school besides a 3/4 mile walk to our pasture to milk the cows one way...While Mr. Dunbar was busy planting his grain... I would stay home from school and assist him...He was afflicted with rheumatism so he appreciated my help. While the old folks were very kind to me I received very little money. I had very little use for money, however, I was very anxious to have a pistol.

I would not ask him for money. My opportunity to win one soon came...Mr. Dunbar whom from now on I will call 'Uncle Jake'...arrived home from town under the influence of liquor. He informed me that he



▲ Watermelons; Col. Gillespie and Lange Brothers were large growers in Lodi.

would pay me 10 cents if I would unharness the team and feed them. He handed me the 10 cents and I placed it in my pocket and carried it for two weeks. When I took it out of my pocket, to my surprise, it was \$2.50 in gold. Right here is where I committed my first sin relative to money matters. I went to school the next day and bought a Smith & Wesson, a 22-caliber...pistol from my schoolmate Frank Keagle. I was well aware I should have told Uncle Jake in regard to the mistake...I reasoned if he would spend his money for drink and besides he seldom ever gave me any change. These conditions would lessen the crime and the temptation to own a pistol was most important to me."

"Not long after purchasing the pistol and while driving a four horse team plowing... I saw Uncle Jake's seven shoats...in a newly sown wheat field. I wanted to...scare them. I blazed away at them with my pistol. The pigs were about 80 yards distant and one of them fell dead shot through the heart. This was a surprise to me. I did not intend to kill the pig. Now the question, what was I to do?

I committed wrong in withholding information relative to the gold piece...purchased the pistol without permission...now I must cover up. I would bury the pig and say nothing...Later Uncle Jake told me he missed one of the pigs and thought

the coyotes were to blame. I always remembered the wrong I did. Several years later I told Uncle Jake the story and made a full confession and apologized for the wrongs I committed. Righteousness bestows to man true moral character. Evil doing availeth



▲ J. A. Anderson Packing and Shipping Shed, Main Street in Lodi.



Lodi watermelons loaded into a grain wagon for railroad shipping. ▲

nothing. Parents should impress on their children truth is the only road to happiness."

By 1880, at the age of sixteen, John's school days were over. Mrs. Mary Franklin was his last teacher. He now started to work for Mr. Jacob Brack for \$30 a month and food. "We arose about 4:30 a.m. and cared for our teams, then breakfast was ready. The rule was to reach the field at sunrise and unhook our teams at sundown. After seeding was completed, we would plow the balance of the land for summer fallow to be sowed to grain the following fall."

"Later we engaged in deepening the head of Otter Slough (Hog Slough). Scraper teams, mostly using two horses, were used to dig a channel more than an eighth of a mile with sufficient depth to float river boats that were loaded with grain and shipped to Port Costa. There ocean ships were then loaded for London and Liverpool, England."

Mr. Brack, the promoter of this project, bought the steamer "Caroline," named after his daughter, with a capacity of 2,000 sacks of grain and pulled a barge hauling 5,000 more sacks. It could make a

round trip in 3 days. Bracks' landing became a shipping point for Northern San Joaquin County agriculture produce and freight in 1881.

For a while John worked for the newly formed San Joaquin & Sierra Nevada Railroad. He laid track from Brack's Landing to points east. Dr. Bently of Woodbridge, Jacob Brack and Watson Green of Lodi, B.F. Langford of Acampo, Captain Holman and D.J. Locke of Lockeford and John Story of Comanche went into this venture together. It provided an alternate to the big four railroads and to shorten the haul to Stockton. The rail was to connect Bracks Landing with Woodbridge, Lodi, Lockeford, Comanche and the Mother Lode. After the track was completed to Wallace a celebration was held at Woodbridge where 15,000 people assembled to hear speeches and dance. Four years later the company was sold.

John M. Posey was now 20 years of age and wanted to see the world. In March of 1883 he sold his one-fifth interest in the Posey Farm for \$2200 and added it to the \$300 he had saved moved to Jacksonville, Oregon with the intention of purchas-

ing a farm with his brother-in-law Charles Bingham. They arrived in Jacksonville, near Medford in the Rogue River Valley, to snow covered ground. They bought 320 acres for \$5500 and returned to Lodi and Galt to move filling two covered wagons with farm equipment needed on their new farm. John also promised himself that, "I would cut out all bad habits. After the first month, I neither swore, drank or used tobacco...I turned 21 and voted the Prohibition Ticket in the presidential election of 1884.

After 23 days of travel John and the Bingham family arrived at the homestead 6 miles northeast of Medford. They sowed about 200 acres of grain, some corn and the remainder was pasture. After harvest the corn was hauled to the sawmill and exchanged for lumber. Twenty-five bushels of corn were traded for 1,000 feet of lumber. They then rebuilt the old barn and constructed a new one. The exchange system was necessary as there was little money in circulation.

There was a lot of time for recreation during the winter when land was too wet to cultivate. Home



▲ A field of Lodi melons ready for harvest; lunch break anytime!

shindigs were held and occasionally a dance in town with music by violin and guitar. All were welcome. John met many young ladies while in Oregon and went to church, a dance or party most Sundays.

Stella was one of the first girls in John's life. One stormy Sunday Stella had a party and only five boys and three girls came. John was elected to brave the storm, to take Stella's pony and get the girl from a nearby farm. Stella played the organ and one of the boys played the violin that night. John recalls, "This was a great night for me, I played in company with two girls. After the party I accompanied the extra girl home and then...returned the pony to Stella. My extra girl was not very talkative, but something seemed to penetrate my very being. Was I was falling in love with the extra girl? I remembered the old adage, 'Words unspoken, when hearts grow warm.' I was getting myself into a dilemma. I had been going with Stella for six months."

In the winter of 1887 the Rogue

Valley was covered with an average depth of 16 inches of snow. Many cattle perished. After holding his grain for one year he sold it for 35 cents per bushel or 1/2 cent per pound. He decided that it was time to return to California even though he had enjoyed his time in Oregon. By January of 1888 John was back home in Lodi. He did some hauling of wood for a few months, but returned home to take care of the Dunbar farm. Since arriving home he had not much interest in social affairs and often thought about his days in Oregon.

In 1890 a neighbor delivered a letter to him. He put it in his pocket to read after his friend left. It was then time for milking. After chores were done he remembered the letter. He recalls, "To my amazement the letter was from the girl whom I was trying to live to forget...It was a dream...my dream came true. She took great pains to write the letter in a mysterious fashion saying she never knew I was leaving the north for

California, she did not know my address and she did not want to disturb me. I was overjoyed...I would answer it tonight." He would soon receive a second letter from the extra girl he went after one stormy night to attend Stella's party. In it she confessed, "Dear John, You don't realize how much I missed you...hoped for the day when we would meet again. After three long years I hesitated until I had the courage to write. It was only through accident I learned your address." After many months of correspondence John sent a letter of proposal and she accepted.

He arrived in Medford on the March 25, 1891. He stayed with friends overnight and the next morning walked two miles to her home. The wedding took place on April 5, 1891 at two o'clock at her parents home with friends and relatives followed by a big dinner of deer meat, chicken with lots of cranberries and pumpkin pies.

Lena Mabel Stimson and John Marion Posey were now man and wife. Lena was born on September 13, 1866 in North Haven, Maine and moved to the Rogue Valley in Oregon as a young girl. The day after the wedding they boarded the train at Medford for Lodi to settle down for life. Their first son, Charles, was born in late 1892.

The J. M. Posey land (160 acres) was located just west of Thornton Road and 1/2 mile north of Turner Road. To the south was the Blohm Ranch and to the north was Brack Track. John rented 40 acres from



▲ A combined harvester at David Kettleman Ranch in Lodi.

Kettleman Photo

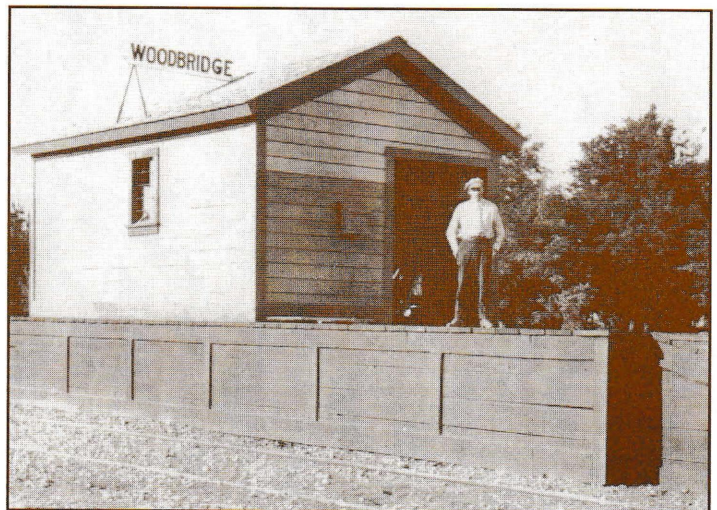
Henry Brack and planted watermelons for the next 16 years. There was no irrigation until later. He was successful with the melons. He also raised grain, cattle and hogs. They "made bacon and salt pork sufficient to last until fall and Mrs. Posey would can 300-400 jars of fruits and vegetables. Chickens and ducks were raised. The milk was skimmed, churned by hand and the butter was molded and ready for market. Ranch butter averaged 15-20 cents per pound. Later the cream separator was invented and still later milk was taken directly to the creamery."

The cattle were sold to the butcher, hogs were marketed, grain was harvested and sold. The watermelons ripened in July and sold at Bracks' Landing to small schooners for two to ten cents per melon. Occasionally a railroad car would be loaded in Lodi and shipped to Portland and Seattle

for \$20-\$125 per car.

After the harvest of 1894 Lena and John joined the Christian Church at Acampo.

The 1894 melon crop was good, but the price was poor. The farmers south of Lodi on the vast sandy deserts were now irrigating and were producing an earlier crop. Competition was keen. John Posey's answer to this problem was to open a wholesale store in San Francisco. He would be away from his family for three months. He rented a building at the



Southern Pacific freight house and platform, Woodbridge 1914. ▲
Photo courtesy of S.P. Collection

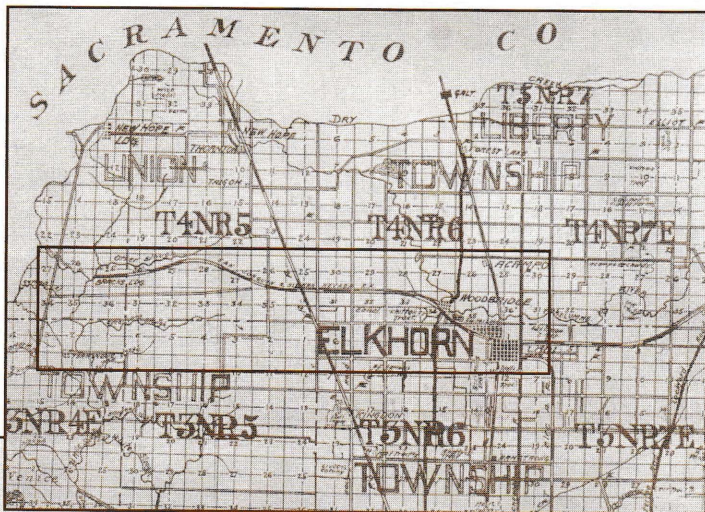
5,000 melons, left at 7 p.m. and arrived in San Francisco the following morning. A salesman named Harry Rule worked with John at the store.

After a time the market was low because of over production. There were even full railroad cars standing on nearby tracks. Some came from Fresno the other points. The melons were soon left on the vine or fed to the hogs.

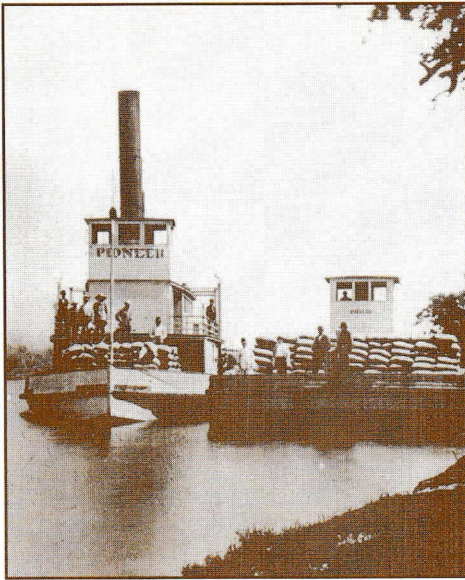
head of Jackson Street on the dock. A leased vessel, The Jessie Matson, arrived at Bracks Landing piloted by Captain Gibson. It took

The melon season of 1895 was better. Mr. Franklin, his neighbor, asked John to market 13 tons of zinfandel grapes along with the melons. They were loaded onto a new vessel, the Duxbury, with a capacity of 6000

▲ Elkhorn Township, northwest corner of San Joaquin County. Inset shows the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Railroad from Brack's Landing to Woodbridge, Lodi, Lockeford and Clements. Note how far west it runs at this time.



The narrow gauge San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada train on Lockeford Street, just east of Sacramento Street. ▲
Photo courtesy of Bank of Stockton Historical Photo Collection



▲ Steamer and barge work together on the Delta.

melons. John was able to sell the grapes for \$10 a ton even though they were not of a top quality and Franklin was satisfied. He offered to sell Posey the balance of his grape crop. Other farmers sent grapes on consignment. John went into the Italian area of the city and made more sales. Posey moved 60,000 watermelons, about 150 tons of wine grapes and his wheat crop was also shipped to San Francisco. The profit was small but he was satisfied that the experience was well worth the endeavor for a 32 year old farmer.

After two years he closed the San Francisco commission business. He purchased 50 acres of land from Mr. Devries in December 1897 for \$3000 and planted 16 acres to Tokays and later 10 acres to Zinfandels. He purchased a windmill from Henderson Brothers.

The 1896 Irrigation project at Woodbridge installed a dam but it was washed out the following year. The next year was a drought after January with no significant spring rain. 1899 proved to be a banner year for the farmers. Their 160-acre dairy farm was at the terminus of the irrigation ditch from Woodbridge. Dredgers were constantly employed to build huge levees throughout the delta. Jacob Brack's dredger was destroyed by fire on Sycamore Slough. Brack salvaged the hull and rebuilt it.

The grain harvester soon displaced the headers and stationary machines. It took 28-30 horses or mules hooked up to the machine driven by a man on a high seat over the wheel horse.

In 1902 John and Lena completed their four-room house on their 50 acre farm. The three older children were attending school. The next year they purchased 100 acres for \$100 an acre and planted it to vines. The wooden dam at Woodbridge was reconstructed and farmers could sign up for alfalfa and summer crops.

As the 1904 vintage year approached about 25 farmers jointly purchased 10 acres on the south bank of the Mokelumne River at Woodbridge for the construction of a winery. John C. Thompson was elected President; Freeman Mills, Secretary; Jacob Brack, Jr., Frank Perott, Charles Newton, Alex Chapdelain and Theodore Beckman were Directors. A Frenchman by the name of Jule Doneux was employed as winemaker. A spur track was connected to the railroad. The distillery would make grape brandy.

John's 27 shares in the winery enabled him to deposit over 200 tons of grapes in the winery. He sold 20 acres of Tokays to Freeman Mills and Henry Thompson on the vines for \$1500. The following year was also good so John installed a five-inch centrifugal pump operated by a 12-horse power engine. The next year was another good year. He had a good offer to purchase his crop of

Tokays but decided to ship on his own. Early rain in September caused the grape skins to slip and he had to haul the crop to the winery. The farmer's gamble caused a loss.

The 9th of March in 1907 was a sad day for the family. Mrs. Posey, Lena, passed away after bronchial pneumonia. She left a husband, 2 sons and 5 daughters, the youngest being just 3 months old. A large flood came the same month with over 6 inches of rain for the month (25.98 inches for the season). The delta flooded and the water did not recede for ten days at the ranch. John had to ride on horseback to Lodi for provisions.

By May he was able to start cultivation of the land. In July, Everett, a son, had typhoid fever as a result of contamination by floodwaters. John continued to raise his family and farm. In 1915 he started in the real estate business in Lodi. He was selling land that he and others developed. He had partners in the business including his son Charles until 1932 when he retired. Two years later he started writing his life story. He had seen the area west of Woodbridge and the delta develop.

John M. Posey was the father of Charlie and Everett Posey, Mrs. Elmo (Nellie Agnes) Fore, Mrs. Everett (Lena Estelle) McKenzie, Mrs. Raymond (Donna Belle) Northrup, all of Lodi and Mrs. Richard (Marguerite) Rossing and Mrs. Warren (Genevieve) Jordan of Stockton.

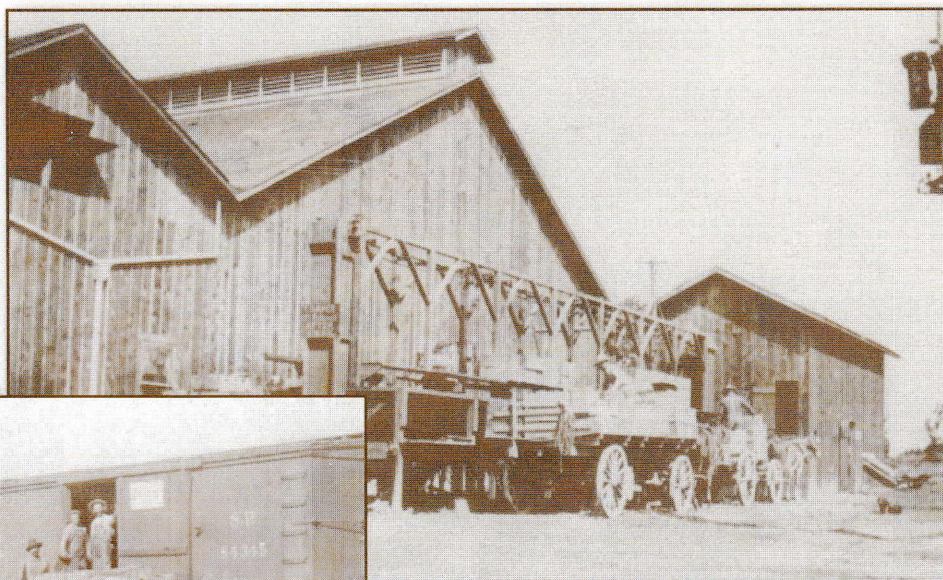
John Marion Posey was born in



▲ Early wooden dam at Woodbridge.

September of 1863 and died in November of 1944. In his 81 years of life in Lodi he saw the grazing area of the elk and the lakes of the delta convert to productive farmlands. He made the transition from grain to melons to vineyards.

There was a lot of tragedy in his life but he raised his family to prepare for whatever came and to make the best of the situation.



Early Lodi Winery. ▲



▲ The railroad was a large improvement over wagons for farmers.

► The grape industry; Woodbridge Road, looking west at railroad crossing at the town of Woodbridge.



Table grapes were placed in large lug boxes and hauled to packing sheds. ▲



▲ John M. Posey home, on Thornton Road between Turner and Woodbridge Roads. Man on left, unknown; Baby, John Everett, Lena, Mother Nellie, Estell and John M., father.



◀ John M. Posey; 1863-1944.



▼ Lena Mable Posey; 1866-1907.



▲ Lodi 1924-1927; the Corey Building at 10 N. School Street, north of Pine Street. Photo courtesy of the Bank of Stockton Historical Photo Collection.

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▲ Turner School, 1923-1924. Standing back row (l to r): Minara Funamura, Blodgett Faveris, James Lauchland, Clyde Johnson, Miss Post (teacher), Minnie Siemering, Anna Bella James, Bernice Harshner. Seated: Mary Funamura, Jolanda Serra, Dorothy Harshner, Grace James, June Kern, Louisa Serra, Laurence Siemering, Jack Locke, Jack Lauchland. Kneeling: Masoa Funamura, Hiroichi Funamura, Hilard James, Fred Lauchland, Royal Spenker, Charles Posey, Mick Lusumana, Frank Cusumanos.